



For: General Public  
From: Tony Robinson, Network Marketing Manager  
Robert J. Alvey, Authority Communications Manager  
501-324-9006; fax: 501-324-9012  
CC: Governor's Office  
Date: October 19, 1999  
Re: Manufacturing Extension Program Client Project

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## **Hickory Springs Expands Production**

### **Arkansas Manufacturing Extension Network Assists Firm**

In less than three years, Hickory Springs Manufacturing Company has significantly increased its production capability – due in part to the assistance it received from the Arkansas Manufacturing Extension Network (the Network).

The Network is one of numerous programs offered by the Arkansas Science & Technology Authority (<http://www.state.ar.us/asta/>), a state agency created to bring the benefits of science and technology to the people and state of Arkansas. The Network (<http://www.state.ar.us/asta/network.html>) is designed to improve Arkansas' manufacturing and industrial competitiveness through the delivery of comprehensive technical and business assistance services.

Network field engineer Loren Berry (<mailto:lberry@actt.engr.uark.edu>) first visited with Hickory Springs engineering manager Mike Cope at the company's Fort Smith headquarters in June of 1996. Berry and Cope identified several areas where the Network might be helpful, beginning with the introduction of a new product.

Known for its sleeper sofa assemblies, Hickory Springs took the folding mechanism from its sleeper assemblies and ingeniously adapted it to a newly designed recreational vehicle (RV) step. Unfamiliar with the RV industry, Cope asked Berry to locate marketing information. Berry's research – with the assistance of the University of Arkansas at Little Rock's Small Business Development Center -- produced a report on the major RV manufacturers, their locations, contact information, and numbers of units sold during the previous three years.

Cope contacted Berry again in July requesting help obtaining welding training on the fabrication of the new step. The company was beginning to produce the new step and welding was a skill new to their facility. Cope believed training was necessary to ensure Hickory Springs consistently produced a quality product, a company standard. Berry arranged to have a Westark Community College faculty member train welding fundamentals to the new welders at Hickory Springs. The training was completed in September 1996. Each production welder was tested and received certification from the American Welding Society (AWS).

Since this manufacturing operation began in 1996, the company has realized over a 2000% increase in its weekly production figures. Hickory Springs has added a number of new employees to help handle the increased production. Additionally, they have installed an automated powder coating line. Cope stated that, at present, the company estimates the majority of the nation's original equipment (OEM) RV step production is being manufactured in Arkansas by Hickory Springs. The company is expanding its approach to the RV market with entry into both the distribution and retail after-market and is also in the process of developing a new product, which will complement its existing line.

Berry is currently working with Cope and Marilyn Harris at Hickory Springs on an information services project. Cope voiced strong support for the Network, noting the value of companies sharing ideas and past successes with each other through the program while maintaining confidentiality.

The Network is affiliated with the National Institute of Standards and Technology's Manufacturing Extension Partnership, a network of 73 such centers across the U.S.

For additional information on the Arkansas Manufacturing Extension Network, contact Tony Robinson at 501-324-8766, 1-800-637-4634, or at [tony.robinson@mail.state.ar.us](mailto:tony.robinson@mail.state.ar.us).

The Network is an Arkansas Science & Technology Authority (Authority) program. The Authority serves as a statewide funding resource for high quality scientific and technological projects. The Authority endeavors to bring the benefits of science and technology to the people and state of Arkansas through scientific research, technology development, business innovation, and education.